

ASSOCIATED PRESS
2 February 1987

Iraqis Irked By Provision of Intelligence to Iran, Ambassador Says

By JOAN MOWER, Associated Press Writer

Iraq's ambassador to the United States said Monday his government is upset that the Reagan administration gave intelligence information to Iran in early 1986, shortly before Tehran scored an important military victory.

"I think that intelligence provisions are even more dangerous than providing arms and military equipment to the government," Iraqi Ambassador Nizar Hamdoon said in a telephone interview with The Associated Press.

Hamdoon, whose country also has received intelligence help from the United States, said officials in Baghdad were perturbed that the administration reportedly handed over information to Iran in late January and early February of last year.

A few days later, on Feb. 9, 1986, Iran launched an offensive, capturing the oil port of Faw within days. Its occupation dealt a serious blow to Iraqi morale and brought the war, now over 6 1/2 years old, to within 15 miles of the Kuwaiti border.

"Obviously, we were upset about it," Hamdoon said, adding that the intelligence aid to Iran came weeks before the invasion of Faw peninsula.

A preliminary report on the Iran-Contra case, released last week by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, said intelligence material was prepared to be given to Iranian arms dealer Manucher Ghorbanifar on Jan. 26, 1986 and in mid-February.

CIA officials, including the new intelligence director, Robert Gates, objected to providing the material to Ghorbanifar, who was an intermediary in the sale of U.S. arms to Tehran. A

"Gates testified that he objected to the release of some specific intelligence relating to Iraq but that he was overruled by the NSC (National Security Council). ... A CIA official was directed to take the intelligence sample to Ghorbanifar," the report said.

The report also quotes former CIA Deputy Director John McMahon as objecting to the move because Ghorbanifar could not be trusted and "because intelligence could give Iran an advantage in the war." But McMahon testified that (former NSC adviser John) Poindexter insisted, and he (McMahon) obeyed," the report said. A

The report does not specify what type of information was shared with Ghorbanifar. Asked about any intelligence help received by Iran, State Department spokesman Charles E. Redman said, "I just don't have anything I can help you with." The United States says it is neutral in the war and wants to see the bloody conflict brought to a close without victor or vanquished.

The administration, however, has helped both sides in the conflict, selling arms to Tehran since August 1985 and secretly providing Iraq with information about Iranian defenses last year.

121

In December, two U.S. officials, speaking on condition they remain anonymous, confirmed that information from U.S. satellite reconnaissance photographs was turned over to Iraq, whose pilots used them to pinpoint targets in bombing raids on Iranian oil terminals and power plants.

The rationale for giving Iraq the data, the officials said at the time, was to prevent the smaller country from being overrun by Iran's larger forces.

Fred Axelgard, a Middle East fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a private think tank, said Iran has had the offensive in the war for five years.

Any U.S. intelligence would be a big boost for Tehran, he said. At the same time, he said, it was "difficult to swallow" the idea that the Iraqis lost the Faw peninsula in February 1986 because of U.S. intelligence.

The Iraqis were caught by surprise and then proved to be militarily inflexible, he said.